

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PHNOM 03846 031215Z

47

ACTION AID-59

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IGA-01 EB-07 AGR-05 IO-10 SR-02

ORM-01 /129 W

----- 124014

O 031130Z MAR 75 ZFF4

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9598

USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE PHNOM PENH 3846

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAID, SOPN, CB, US

SUBJECT: ERRONEOUS UPI STORY ABOUT AMERICAN RICE AIRLIFT

DEPT PASS AID/W

1. EMBASSY LEARNED FROM AID/W PHONE CALL TO ACTING USAID DIRECTOR OF UPI STORY DATED PHNOM PENH MARCH 3 ALLEGING THAT GKR HAD ORDERED THAT AMERICAN RICE BEING AIRLIFTED INTO PHNOM PENH BE RESTRICTED TO MILITARY AND THEIR DEPENDENTS. EMBASSY IS THEREFORE ISSUING CORRECTIVE PRESS RELEASE (SEE PARA 3 BELOW FOR TEXT) TO ALL CORRESPONDENTS IN PHNOM PENH AT 1800 HOURS MARCH 3.

2. COMMENT: AS DEPT AWARE, THIS EMBASSY HAS LONG BEEN PLAGUED BY INACCURATE STORIES FILED BY UPI FROM HERE ON A VARIETY OF SUBJECTS. UPI IS PRESENTLY REPRESENTED HERE BY A LOCAL (KHMER) STRINGER ONLY. WE UNDERSTAND THIS RICE STORY WAS FILED BY A VISITING UPI AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT WHO CAME HERE FOR ONE DAY WITH CODEL ON MARCH 1, BUT IN OUR OPINION IT IS IRRESPONSIBLE OF UPI, ONE OF MAJOR US INTERNATIONAL NEWS AGENCIES, TO HAVE CAMBODIA STORY
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PAGE 02 PHNOM 03846 031215Z

COVERED BY WHAT AMOUNTS TO A STRINGER AT A TIME WHEN NEWS FROM PHNOM PENH IS RECEIVING HEAVY PLAY IN US AND

AROUND WORLD. END COMMENT.

3. BEGIN TEXT. AMERICAN EMBASSY PHNOM PENH PRESS RELEASE.

THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IS ISSUING THIS STATEMENT TODAY, MARCH 3, TO CORRECT A COMPLETELY ERRONEOUS STORY FILED FROM PHNOM PENH BY UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL REGARDING THE AMERICAN RICE AIRLIFT AND THE RICE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM. THE STORY ALLEGED THAT THE KHMER REPUBLIC GOVERNMENT HAD ISSUED A DECISION RESTRICTING RICE BEING AIRLIFTED INTO PHNOM PENH BY THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT TO CAMBODIAN SOLDIERS AND THEIR FAMILIES. THIS STORY IS WITHOUT ANY FOUNDATION IN FACT, AS THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION WILL MAKE CLEAR.

THUS FAR NO RICE WHICH HAS BEEN AIRLIFTED INTO PHNOM PENH (THE AIRLIFT BEGAN FEB 27) HAS BEEN DISTRIBUTED TO ANYONE. IT IS ALL BEING STORED, THROUGH A COMPLETELY CIVILIAN OPERATION, IN SONEXIM WAREHOUSES, WITH VERIFICATION BY THE SOCIETE GENERAL DE SURVEILLANCE UNDER A CONTRACT WITH USAID. THIS AIRLIFTED RICE WILL NOT BEGIN TO BE DISTRIBUTED UNTIL SONEXIM'S PRE-AIRLIFT STOCKS OF LOCALLY-PRODUCED AND IMPORTED AMERICAN RICE HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTED. WHEN THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE AIRLIFTED RICE BEGINS, IT WILL BE COMPLETELY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM CURRENTLY IN EFFECT, AS DETAILED IN THE PARAGRAPH BELOW. DURING FEBRUARY OFFICIAL RICE DISTRIBUTION IN PHNOM PENH AVERAGED 570 METRIC TONS PER DAY. THE RICE WAS SOLD TO THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE IN THE AVERAGE QUANTITIES SHOWN:

- MILITARY AND THEIR DEPENDENTS--200 METRIC TONS
- CIVIL SERVANTS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS--70 METRIC TONS
- REST OF CIVIL POPULATION--280 METRIC TONS

THE REMAINING APPROXIMATELY 20 METRIC TONS PER DAY ARE DISTRIBUTED FREE OF CHARGE TO REFUGEES BY THE SEVERAL VOLUNTARY AGENCIES WORKING IN THE KHMER REPUBLIC. WE HAVE CHECKED WITH SONEXIM (THE PURCHASER AND STORER OF RICE) AND OFFINACO (THE DISTRIBUTOR OF RICE), AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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PAGE 03 PHNOM 03846 031215Z

NEITHER ONE HAS RECEIVED ANY ORDER FROM ANYONE CHANGING THE CURRENT OR FUTURE RICE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM OR PATTERN.

ONCE AGAIN THE EMBASSY IS OBLIGED TO REQUEST ITS FRIENDS IN THE PRESS TO CHECK THEIR FACTS WITH THE EMBASSY BEFORE FILING STORIES INVOLVING U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES IN CAMBODIA. WE ARE WILLING TO RESPOND TO QUERIES AT ANY TIME IN AN EFFORT TO AVOID THE MUTUALLY EMBARRASSING INACCURATE STORIES SUCH AS THE ONE FILED IN THIS INSTANCE.

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
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